

More Sample Modules

Before AA

There is nothing new about alcoholism. It has been with us since the first man planted crops instead of chasing game. Our first crops were grain, which we grew for bread and beer.

From the very beginning, there were those who could not handle beer.

Later, we grew fruit and pressed wine, and there were more who could not handle the wine.

Still later, we distilled spirits, and the plague of alcoholism descended and settled in to stay.

Alcoholism is documented throughout history without effective solutions. Public shame, logic, punishment, imprisonment, asylums, and even death have been the responses, but none have had effect with “alcoholics of our type.”

Religion and Alcoholism

Every culture has had something to say about alcoholism. For Christians and Jews, it can be found in the Old Testament, Proverbs 23:20-31, they say:

²⁹Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes?

³⁰They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.

³¹Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.

³²At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

³³Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.

³⁴Yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast.

³⁵They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

In Buddhism there are the Five Precepts by which you are supposed to live:

Avoid Killing,

Avoid Lying,

Avoid Stealing,

*Avoid Sexual Misconduct, and
Avoid Intoxication*

Islam teaches that believers are to abstain from alcohol in all its forms. (The word “alcohol” is from Arabic.)

Native Americans did not have exposure to alcohol and when it was presented to them, they had no defense against alcoholism. Associated Press, 8/28/2008. Federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported 11.1% of deaths in the Native American Community, versus 3.3% among the non-Native population.

The Associated Press, on 8/25/2009, reported drinking caused more than half the deaths among Russians aged 15 to 54 in the turbulent era following the Soviet collapse. Russian alcoholism remains severe and a grim joke from Russia says “What stage comes between socialism and communism? Alcoholism.”

One in 25 deaths around the world is caused by alcohol consumption, and booze is now as damaging to global health as tobacco was a decade ago, according to a new study in the British medical journal the Lancet (June 29, 2009).

The “Why?” of Alcoholism

Throughout history, there have only been three answers to Alcoholism:

- 1) It's a Sin, Stop It!
- 2) You're Selfish; Stop It!
- 3) You're Crazy; there's nothing anyone can do.

Spontaneous recovery through spiritual means occurred, but not as a consistent solution – just an occasional gift from God. It was the alcoholics fault if he/she did not choose to give up their sin.

At the end of the 19th Century, a new answer appeared:

- 4) It's a subconscious drive.

A combination of spiritual teachings and psychiatry was the foundation of work by “the Emmanuel Movement,” first with victims of tuberculosis and later with alcoholics through a sub-group, “The Jacoby Club.”

In the early 20th century, scientific investigation brought about a fifth answer:

- 5) It's a disease.

The AA approach is to combine these answers to treat alcoholism as a three-part disease with:

The Spiritual Component
(Disconnection)

The Physical Component (Addiction)

The Psychological Component
(Obsession)

Washingtonians

During the early 19th Century, six drunks from a bar in Baltimore, MD, decided they would go to a local Temperance lecture and heckle the speaker from the audience. After the lecture, they returned to the bar and discovered that they could stop their own drinking if they talked with each other about the reasons they felt they drank.

People moved away and started new groups in other cities. Visitors became impressed with the success of the new non-drinkers and carried the idea to still more groups that were started. By 1842, a large network of these meetings existed across the US and they decided to have a day of celebration. Letters went out declaring:

- a) The groups would be known as the Washingtonians (named for Martha Washington, known for her temperance leanings) and
- b) on George Washington's birthday (February 22, 1842) they would hold a national day of celebration. Groups were encouraged to host a picnic with speakers and general fellowship.

The speaker at the Springfield, IL meeting was a young Abraham Lincoln, who is recorded as saying:

"If we take habitual drunkards as a class, their heads and their hearts will bear an advantageous comparison with those of any other class. There seems ever to have been a proneness in the brilliant and warm-blooded to fall in to this vice. The demon of intemperance ever seems to have delighted in sucking the blood of genius and generosity.

*~Abraham Lincoln,
to the Washington Temperance Society,
Springfield, Illinois, 22 February 1842*

But the rising popularity of the Washingtonians attracted the wider Temperance movement and they stopped being a society of drunks helping other drunks stay sober, to a society lecturing on the evils of alcohol and later, other evils.

Founded on the success of the original Washingtonian group, the new Washingtonians crusaded in the war of Temperance on King Alcohol. Their popularity grew until, in 1852, they claimed to have 5 million people to have signed the Pledge, but you did not have to be an alcoholic to sign the Pledge. A Pledge was simply a paper that said you did not support the manufacture, sale, distribution, or use of alcohol. School children and others signed, but a block of 5 million could have a great deal of political importance.

The Washingtonians expanded beyond alcohol, to spread themselves to the issues of Slavery, pro and con; the gold standard, pro and con; and the admission of Texas to the Union, pro and con.

They argued in their meetings, their public lectures flourished, then declined when the public tired of the public arguments. All of the good that could have been done was destroyed by their lack of unity. By 1861, at the start of the Civil War, they were gone. You could not find a Washingtonian group. They had died away.

We will never know how many alcoholics were lost because we do not know how many of the 5 million were actually alcoholics, but all the good they had done was swept away with the failure of that early fellowship.

Bill Wilson did not know about the Washingtonians when AA was first forming. He came to the conclusion the Washingtonians failed because of their lack of unity and lack of focus. The groups competed

with each other for members. They debated issues in public, and divided along the pros and cons of those issues.

Psychiatry

In the earliest days of alcohol, there were just the three responses to the disease: it is a sin (stop it); you are selfish (stop it), or you are crazy.

The rise of psychiatry in the late 19th Century provided a fourth answer – the sub conscious. You may be doing things for reasons you do not understand, or even know about. This concept is so prevalent today it is hard to imagine there was a time when it was not there.

But at the turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries, this was a new idea. With other scientific thoughts of the day, it was believed that psychiatry was the key to all man's emotional and mental problems.

Since we now believe that alcoholism has several components – physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and behavioral – we feel this is a simplistic approach. But in its day it was a major advance in the response and treatment of alcoholism.

Emmanuel and the Jacoby Club

In 1906, the Emmanuel Episcopal Church, under the direction of Dr. Elwood Worcester and Dr. Samuel McComb, began a new ministry to combine psychiatry and spirituality in the treatment of a dreaded disease of the time – tuberculosis. Tuberculosis (or TB) was rampant and had the same emotional impact on families and neighbors as AIDS had in the late 20th Century. This group was dubbed The Emmanuel Movement⁶.

Victims of the disease were shunned, isolated, and abandoned. Fear of contracting the disease dictated public policy and private conduct. The victims were generally left to die on their own.

But the Emmanuel movement taught that with a combination of psychiatry and their focus on faith, it was possible to live a life and be restored to the maximum productivity possible, even with the disease.

When they met with success with their “class” for victims of TB, they opened their class to “emotional problems” and a significant portion of the people who attended (some estimates say 80%) were alcoholic. The combination of spirituality and psychiatry proved to be effective in getting these newcomers sober and help them remain sober using the movements method.

To their credit, and unlike the failed Washingtonian movement of the mid-19th Century, the Emmanuel did not try to put all their eggs in one basket and created a new sub-group specifically for alcoholics.

This new group was dubbed “The Jacoby Club” under the sponsorship of rubber merchant Ernest Jacoby, with weekly “Men

Meeting Men” group sessions for alcoholics in the church basement.

It was members of the Jacoby Club who told the businessman mentioned in the Big Book (Rowland Hazard) that there was nothing they had to offer that would help him. It was their suggestion that Rowland enter real psychiatric therapy with a real therapist if he hoped to ever find and maintain sobriety.

The Jacoby Club continued until 1989, but with the availability of Alcoholics Anonymous, made its weekly sessions unnecessary.

⁶ Drawn from the *en.wikipedia.com* entry for “The Emmanuel Movement”.

The Oxford Groups

Frank Buchman, an Episcopal minister from the United States and serving at a boy's school in Keswick England, had a conversion experience and began a group he dubbed "A Century Christian Fellowship." Under his leadership, the group took teams of like-minded believers to China, Africa, India, and the United States. The group functioned as they imagined believers lived in the 1st Century. They received no salaries, held no positions, and were dependent on those with whom they fellowshiped for food, shelter, and transportation. Fortunately, Oxford Group members were very well situated and were seldom lacking for accommodations.

While a group of the First Century Christian Fellowship travelled in South Africa, a reporter asked a train porter how to find them. The man responded, "Oh, you mean the Oxford Group"⁷, indicating the luggage which had Oxford stenciled on all the bags. The reporter used that name to refer to the group and it stuck.

The group was unlike other forms of evangelism in that it targeted and directed its efforts to the "up and outers", the elites and wealthy of society. It made use of publicity regarding its prominent converts, and was caricatured as a "Salvation Army for snobs." Buchman's message did not challenge the status quo and thus aided the Group's popularity among the well-to-do. Buchman made the cover of Time Magazine as "Cultist Frank Buchman: God is a Millionaire" in 1936. For a U.S. headquarters, he built a multimillion-dollar establishment on Michigan's Macinac Island, with room for 1,000 visitors. From Caux to London's Berkeley Square to New York's Westchester County layouts, Buchman and his followers had the best. In response to criticism,

Buchman had an answer, "Isn't God a millionaire?"

Buchman became a favorite of highly-placed men and women and frequently held audiences with Presidents, Kings, and world leaders. After meeting with Buchman, Mahatma Gandhi told reporters "people need to listen to this man. He has the first great idea to come out of the West."

After a meeting with Adolph Hitler, who Buchman had hoped to convert, the Oxford Group received negative publicity as Nazi sympathizers. The Oxford University demanded they stop calling themselves "the Oxford Group" and the name was changed to "Moral Re-Armament", the MRA.

With the death of Frank Buchman in 1961, the group lost much of its reputation on the world stage, although it still exists under the name Initiatives of Change (www.us.iofc.org/).

Members of what would become AA were members of the Oxford Groups and we owe much of our structure and methods to that earlier group.

⁷ Drawn from the *en.wikipedia.com* entry for "Oxford Group".

The Oxford Group System

THE FOUR ABSOLUTES

The Oxford Group taught a focus on a personal relationship to God through an effort to achieve Four Absolutes.

- *Absolute Purity*
- *Absolute Honesty*
- *Absolute Unselfishness*
- *Absolute Love*

While perfection was not likely, the need to struggle in that direction was still necessary.

THE FIVE CS

The Oxford Groups also taught “Five Cs” to illustrate their program of spiritual growth.

- *Confidence*
- *Confession*
- *Conviction*
- *Conversion*
- *Continuance*

THE PRACTICES

Members of the Oxford Group had several daily practices that they used to maintain their focus and their growth.

Quiet Time – a period of quiet meditation, reflection, and prayer, usually every morning.

Guidance – the process of praying, meditating, and when you feel your prayer had been answered with “Guidance” or direction for your actions, you checked your Guidance with other people, lest your ego deceive you into inappropriate action.

AA has continued stressing the practices of daily quiet time for prayer and meditation, but successful members also report some sort of Checking also be used, either through meetings or one-on-one discussion with a sponsor or other members.

AA Path

At the time of AAs early formation, the Washingtonian Movement was not directly linked to AA growth.

The AA lineage is carried through:

SIGMUND FREUD – The publication of *Interpretation of Dreams* led to an understanding of subconscious motivation in unhealthy behaviors, including alcoholism.

THE EMMANUEL MOVEMENT – Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Boston took ideas of Freud’s psychiatric approach with elements of spirituality to carry the idea of living a full and balanced life, even though carrying a disease to patients in a local Tuberculosis war. When this process found success they opened a new “mental problems” group and the majority of men appearing were alcoholics. A new group was formed, financed by rubber magnate E. Jacoby – The Jacoby Club.

THE JACOBY GROUP – Rowland Hazard attended the Jacoby Group in Boston and was told that his alcoholism would not be helped by their group; he needed serious psychotherapy from a real doctor.

ROWLAND HAZARD – Rowland was taken to Europe by his father and brother. When Freud refused him as a patient, Rowland was taken to Karl Jung’s sanitarium in Switzerland, where he was confined for almost a year.

KARL JUNG – Dr. Jung’s therapy was not as a “hard science,” but more subjective than the strict interpretation of Freud. He worked with Hazard until they agreed that he had learned as much as Jung could offer. Hazard was sure that his self-knowledge would allow him to stay sober.

Hazard returned to America and was drunk on the boat before it docked in New York. He

took his wife and son to New Mexico, but his father and brother eventually returned him to Jung. Jung said he had nothing more to offer, but that his therapy had been attempting to bring Hazard to a major psychological rearrangement. He told Rowland that throughout history a spontaneous spiritual experience had saved a select few from alcoholism. But his efforts to bring about such a change in Rowland had failed.

Jung advised Rowland to find a spiritual practice to help him find such an experience.

THE OXFORD GROUP – Rowland Hazard found an “Oxford Group” in London and began attending. He remained sober. When he returned to New York, he continued attending. When Rowland had a few months of sobriety, he and two friends went to get Ebby Thacher out of involuntary commitment in Vermont, where Ebby’s recurring drunken behavior had reached the limit of his judge’s tolerance.

EBBY THACHER – Ebby came to New York with Rowland as part of his agreement with the Vermont judge to leave his jurisdiction. Ebby began attending Oxford Groups with Rowland and remained sober.

Ebby then carried the message to Bill Wilson, which is where most people agree the story of Alcoholics Anonymous begins.

Questions are raised as to why Bill Wilson, and not Ebby or Rowland, is considered the key starting point for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Rowland Hazard’s desire to stay sober was fleeting and he had tried many previous methods. His brother and his father were the driving force of his European stay with Dr. Jung. When Rowland found sobriety through the Oxford Group, as part of his review of his past and the damage he had done, he committed to remain sober for his mother. He said he wanted to give his mother some good memories before she died. She had been put through so much by his drinking.

Rowland Hazard died sober.

Ebby Thacher stayed sober during the critical period of transmission of the message to Bill Wilson, but did not remain sober. His initial sobriety was based on fear of involuntary commitment to an asylum for the rest of his life. Ebby later drank, got sober again, drank, and got sober again several times. He spent most of his final years with a Texas AA community who cared for him when he relapsed and praised him while sober.

Ebby died sober at a health farm in upstate New York, but begged for a drink at the end.

More on the Oxford Groups

- Called “First Century Christianity Association.”
- Principles of no positions, no salaries, no prestige; Four Absolutes, Five Cs, and Four Step process.
- Dubbed The Oxford Group by South African reporter.
- The “Up and Out” membership; Principles.
- World Leaders.
- Gandhi – “The world needs to listen to this man – he has the first good idea to come out of the west.”
- Attempt to convert Hitler resulted in bad publicity for Oxford Groups. Oxford University demanded they change their name. Became MRA, “Moral Re-Armament.”
- Rowland H. finds the Oxford Group.
- Rowland takes Ebby T. from Vermont and Ebby begins attending meetings in the Oxford Groups.
- Ebby T. carries the message to Bill Wilson.
- Bill gets sober and begins attending Oxford Groups with his wife, Lois.
- Bill gets in touch with the Oxford Group in Akron, connects to Dr. Bob (through Henrietta Seiberling).
- Bill and Dr. Bob start “the alcoholic squad” of the Oxford Group. Friction begins with OG Members.
- Big Book begins while still in the Oxford Group.

Friction with the Oxford Groups

Meetings were held in members’ homes and they did not like the “class of person” being brought through their drawers.

Dr. Bob was told, “You are glorying in your sin. My tobacco is every bit the sin your alcohol is.”

Bob’s answer was “Your tobacco will not send you to the prison, the gutter, or the grave.”

In New York, Bill Wilson and his wife, Lois, were effectively ostracized from their local group because of Bill’s insistence of finding and working with alcoholics.

Both Bill and Bob remained devoted to the Oxford Group’s principles and practices, but the friction continued to develop.

Birth of the Big Book

The only meetings were in New York (under the direction of Bill Wilson) and Akron, OH (under the tutelage of Dr. Bob Smith). Correspondence between the meetings developed three primary ideas to spread the word.

The Big Book was created by a vote of the young fellowship while it was still identified as part of the Oxford Groups and discussion with sober alcoholics in that fellowship.

In 1938, the “alcoholic squad” wanted to find a way to share their message to other alcoholics seeking sobriety. Three options were considered.

- a) AA Missionaries
- b) AA Facilities (hospitals, etc.)
- c) AA Book.

Option a was not chosen because those who made it into the Oxford Group fellowship had experienced many attempts to help them by well-meaning, religious people, but they ignored them. There was no reason to think that those still drunk would see AA missionaries as any different from the others.

Option b was not chosen because hospitals would be boards, prestigious titles, salaries, and the need to manage staffs, etc. It would take their focus from their message while presenting a danger to those who would be drawn into that world.

Option c was chosen.

The first idea was paid “missionaries” to carry the word of their system of recovery from city to city. It was voted down because the newly sober drunks had not listened to any other type of missionary effort to get them sober. It would also create a paid, “professional” class of AAs who would be perceived as setting

themselves above the common drunks they were trying to help.

The second idea was a new hospital that would offer counseling, medical detox, and financial, taking in drunks at one end and sending recovered alcoholics out into the community with their new, spiritual foundation to repair the damage they had done in their families and communities.

But a new hospital would restrict the recovery effort to those who could afford another hospital, and most of the drunks at the level where our founders began their recoveries were not at a point where they no longer had those resources. A hospital would also create a new danger with positions, names of letterheads, budgets, and public prestige.

The third idea was a book to outline their process and their stories.

Big Book Development

Bill Wilson fancied himself a writer. When the question of a book for the young fellowship came up, he began work on his own story, which would, of course, open the book.

The first man Bill helped get sober in New York was a businessman named Hank Parkhurst. Hank was running a car polish company out of New Jersey and had, among his skills from an erratic background, the knowledge of how to “package” a book. This means to coordinate a writer, an editor, a typesetter, a printer, a bindery, and a distributor to produce a book from the beginning until it was available to people to buy at newsstands.

When Hank saw what Bill had written he sat down and wrote out an outline of what needed to be in the book and in what order. He then made his secretary at the auto polish office available to Bill to type up what Bill wrote out in longhand.

Hank then stayed on Bill to complete the manuscript while encouraging many other members of the fellowship to write out their own stories (the beginning of the personal stories at the back of each edition of the book).

While the book was being written, Bill and Hank tried to drum up interest in the book with publishers. They did receive an offer from Harper & Row to publish the book, and were offered an advance against royalties of \$1500.

The offer convinced Bill and Hank that there was real potential in the sale of the book. \$1500 was more than most working people made in a year. The two began to develop a plan to publish the book themselves to allow control over what was published and to keep all the income for themselves.

While Bill was still writing, he and Hank created Works Publishing, Inc., and sold stock in the new company.

The “stock” consisted of a pad of blank stock certificates purchased from a local stationery store and on which they wrote “Works Publishing, Inc.” and valued the stock at \$25 each.

Many members purchased stock by paying in installments as low as 50¢ per month.

Hank Parkhurst

The first man to get sober with Bill W. in New York, Hank Parkhurst, had some experience with book packaging. Bill Wilson wrote a first attempt at his story for the Big Book and Hank responded with a 12-page outline of what should go into the book, in what order, and then did what was needed to make the book happen. It was not an outline of contents for the book, but the elements he felt needed to be included to make the book a success. The outline included some of his marketing ideas for the new book.

Hank owned a car polish business in New Jersey, which was on hard times with many others during the Great Depression. He made his secretary (Ruth Hock) available to type up Bill's longhand copy, and she in turn sent carbons of the manuscript to Akron for discussion by that group.

In late 1938, Hank arranged to have 400 copies of the original manuscript using a cheap printing process called "Multilith" (a brand name). His intent was to make money by selling the multilith copies of the manuscript for \$3.50 and a promise to include a copy of the hardback when it was published.

Not one copy of the book was sold. \$3.50 was exorbitant. At that time, a steak breakfast was 35¢, a movie matinee was 20¢, a lunch with two hotdogs and a cup of soda was 10¢, and a week in a reputable rooming house with your own bed and breakfast and dinner for seven days was \$3.50.

With the unsold copies of the manuscript sitting in the New Jersey office, the decision was made to send out copies to everyone active in the program at that time. Those trying to get sober, their wives, interested doctors, ministers, and anyone else interested was invited to review the manuscript and make comments.

Within 60 days, the comments came in and focused on the language. Bill Wilson's therapist, Dr. Harry Thiebolt, made the successful argument that the tone of the volume was too threatening. The manuscript was changed from the harsh direction of "You must do this" to the invitation of "this is what we have done."

The idea "if you want what we have you can do the things we have done," or "do the work and get the result" became standard in AA presentation.

Hank Parkhurst negotiated with Cornwall Printers in Cornwall, NY to typeset, print, and bind the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* in their "down" time, and the printer allowed Hank to pick up copies of the bound book on a cash basis. Cornwall warehoused the book and did not release anything that was not paid for before it left the shop.

Hank did not stay sober and died drunk. When he began to drink, he moved to Cleveland, OH, where he found a ready audience for his tales that Bill Wilson had embezzled money in excess of 40 times the actual monies received. His gossip found fertile ground, and the rumors survive to this day.

Research shows that his death was a result of an attempted acrobatic stunt while drunk.

The Twelve Steps

The Twelve Steps were not a part of the early process before the publication of the Big Book. The Oxford Group used a “six step” system that was not written down, but rephrased in various ways through the years.

In one of the meetings about the development of the book in Bill’s house on Clinton Street, both were becoming full of themselves and talking about putting “some of that spirituality stuff” into the book because it would help sales.

At that point, Bill’s wife, Lois, who had been listening from the kitchen, erupted into the discussion. Lois stuck her finger into Bill’s face and said, strongly, “If you keep talking like that, you’re going to drink!”

Overwhelmed with what that would mean, Lois burst into tears and ran upstairs, leaving Bill and Hank in an awkward silence. Hank excused himself and went home, leaving Bill to digest what had just happened.

Bill had been a member of the Oxford Groups for several years, and the OG had a system of prayer, followed by meditation. Bill retired to the bed he had built under the stairs, a necessity because Bill was too tall to stretch out on a regular sized bed. He prayed and meditated on the problem before him.

After about an hour, he sat up and took the yellow pad and pencil from their regular position on the table next to his bed, and began to write.

He broke down the Oxford Group’s Six Steps into smaller chunks and, when he was satisfied, he counted them and found Twelve Steps. Twelve appealed to him as a Christian, and he shared them with Hank Parkhurst and members of his New York Oxford Group. After Ruthie Hock typed up the Steps, a copy was sent to Akron for discussion.

The Steps, as they appear today, are only a few words different from the original longhand list.

The Multilith Big Book

When the manuscript was finished, Hank thought he had a way to make some money off the unpublished book. He had 400 copies reproduced in a cheap, water-based printing system called “Multilith.” His plan was to raise cash by selling these copies of the manuscript for \$3.50 each, with a promise that the buyer would get a copy of the hardcover as soon as it was published.

No one bought a single copy of the manuscript.

So, in January 1939, the decision was made to circulate these copies to the fellowship for review. Every sober member of the program, their wives (and husbands, because women were getting sober by now), and any professional willing to make comment, received a copy. Those professionals included doctors, ministers, business professionals, and spouses of sober members.

The 400 copies went out in January and in less than 60 days they received almost half of the copies back with suggestions for change.

There were very few suggestions.

It should be understood that among the fellowship in those early Oxford Groups were many “traveling men.” Traveling salesmen were a common profession, so men who had gotten sober in New York or Akron were responding from wherever they were on the road.

Responses and edits came from beyond New York and Akron, thanks to these traveling men. Copies were returned from Boston, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Baltimore, and more.

A pattern developed that surprised the authors. Although the dozens of responders were separated in time and space, their

comments shared the same ideas in the same sections of the original manuscript.

The decision was made to record all these changes in one copy of the Multilith edition, and despite the lack of direct communication between the members making comment, they came to the same conclusions at the same point.

This proved to be the beginning of what was later called “group conscience,” but the changes to the document were recorded in one copy, which can still be found in the AA World Service Office archive. The changes to these few sections were so intense that the typesetter was unable to read the manuscript when the time came to cast the lead type for publication.

The most significant comment appears to be from Bill’s personal psychiatrist, who suggested the original finger-wagging-in-your-face tone of Bill’s first draft be changed to a simpler, invitational manner.

“You” and “You must” became “we” and a description of “what we did.” It was possible for the drunk seeking recovery to go through the book without feeling attacked. They were able to choose to do what the people in the book did, or not, with knowledge of the result, if their refusal to do what was required.

Clarence Snyder

In 1938, Clarence Snyder, a low-bottom alcoholic from Cleveland, OH, arrived in Akron to get sober with Dr. Bob and his Oxford Group “alcoholic squad”. His sister’s children used Bill Wilson’s brother-in-law as their pediatrician, and it was his discussion of Bill’s success with his alcohol problem that encouraged Clarence’s family to send him to Akron.

Clarence became sober with Dr. Bob and eventually was able to return to Akron, where another man getting sober with Dr. Bob allowed Clarence to stay in his home in Cleveland. Clarence arrived in time to receive a multilith copy of the Big Book manuscript.

When he returned to Cleveland, he tried to organize a new group, but found that most of the alcoholics he encountered were Catholics, and the local archdiocese had declared that the Oxford Group was not appropriate for Catholics. In fact, Catholics who attended the Oxford Group were threatened with excommunication.

In Akron, several Catholics were attending Dr. Bob’s meeting and Clarence began driving a group of newcomers to Akron for the Wednesday night meetings.

During this time, the friction between the Oxford Group and the growing, recovering community was increasing. One man told Dr. Bob “You are glorying in your sin – my tobacco is every bit the sin your alcohol is.”

Dr. Bob’s response was simple; “Your tobacco will not send you to the prison, the madhouse, or the gutter.”

On a March night, the tension was very high and Clarence decided he’d had enough. He announced, “Tomorrow night, in Cleveland, we will have the first meeting not associated with the Oxford Group. It will be based on

this book, Alcoholics Anonymous, and we will study what is in this book!”

In one move, Clarence established AA as a separate fellowship, and the focus on a Big Book study. The following night, Thursday, March 18, 1939, the first AA meeting was held in Cleveland.

Clarence also changed the meaning of “sponsor” to what we use today. Originally, a “sponsor” was the man who agreed to cosign your detox bill at St. Thomas hospital in Akron, who then agreed to work with you on, what we would now call, the “first Six Steps,” and then took the new man to his first Oxford Group meeting.

There was no open meeting list for the Oxford Group and you had to “know someone” to get in. The sponsor was ensuring that if you broke or stole something, he would be responsible.

Clarence changed sponsorship to one man (or woman, now that women were getting sober, too) with some experience in the program working with a newcomer.

This system worked to grow Cleveland meetings at a rate which surprised Bill and Bob. At the end of 1939, there was Meeting #1 in Akron; Meeting #2 in New York City; and Cleveland had meetings #3, #4, and #5. In the first few months of 1940, two more meetings formed in Cleveland.

Clarence was abrasive, actively disliked the Traditions, always introduced himself with his last name, and introduced himself frequently as “the man who founded AA.”

He has been slighted in official AA literature, but deserves recognition for his contributions for shaping our meetings, book studies, and sponsorship as they are now enjoyed by the program.

Separation from the Oxford Groups

In the few years the young fellowship existed within the Oxford Group, there was a constant friction between the overall spiritual focus of the OG and this new group's emphasis on alcoholism.

One member told Dr. Bob, "You are glorying in your sin. My tobacco is every bit the sin your alcohol is."

Bob's response was short and direct. "Your tobacco will not send you to the gutter, prison, or the grave."

During the ongoing friction between the "drunk squad" and the formal Oxford Group members, a man enters the scene that deserves some appreciation for his contributions to our fellowship.

Clarence Snyder was a drunk from Cleveland whose sister had found out about Dr. Bob and his sober drunks. She shipped Clarence off to St. Thomas hospital for detox and there Dr. Bob became his sponsor. When he left St. Thomas, he moved in with Dr. Bob, which was common in those early days.

While there, Clarence received his multilith copy of the manuscript and became familiar with the friction between the OG and the group of sober members of the "drunk squad."

When he returned to Cleveland, Clarence wanted to form a new group but found that the men he encountered who wanted to get sober were Catholic. The local Catholic archdiocese had threatened excommunication for members who attended Oxford Group meetings.

The archdiocese for Akron had not made that same determination so Clarence loaded his group of drunks into some cars and headed

down to Akron each Wednesday for their Oxford Group meeting with Dr. Bob.

In March of 1939, one of these meetings erupted into loud disagreement between the sober drunks and the traditional OG members. Frustrated with the conflict, Clarence announced that tomorrow night, in Cleveland, they would host the first meeting that was not affiliated with the Oxford Group and that they would use the book "Alcoholics Anonymous" as a guide.

The following night, Thursday, March 17, 1938, Clarence C. held the first independent meeting called "Alcoholics Anonymous" after the book. This early, separate meeting was based on prayer, meditation, and studying the book together.

In one swoop, Clarence established unaffiliated meetings, the tradition of studying the Big Book, and the name of the new fellowship, although it should be clear the name of the book came first.

Evolution of Sponsorship

Before we shift from Clarence's appearance in the growth of AA, we should also recognize that Clarence provided the model for what we now call "sponsorship."

In the Oxford Groups, your sponsor was the man who cosigned for your admission into medical detox. Drunks were notorious for not paying their bills and without a cosigner, the hospital would not admit them for alcoholism. Remember, at this time alcoholism was not a recognized disease and most admissions were for "gastric distress."

The sponsor then worked with the new man on what we would now call the first Six Steps. According to Clarence S., their first responsibility was helping the new man find his faith as a Christian.

This means that before the new man⁸ went to his first meeting, he had to be in a hospital detox with a Sponsor visiting to guide him and quiet time with prayer and meditation had been established. He worked with a sponsor successfully to admit his own alcoholism, turned his life and will over to his new understanding of God or Higher Power, made inventory of his past, shared it with his sponsor, and become willing to have his defects removed.

You could not simply "go to a meeting." There was no meeting guide. You had to know someone who knew. The sponsor also took responsibility for the man he brought to the meeting. If the new man broke or stole something, it was for the sponsor to set it right.

The new man entered his first meeting of the fellowship on his knees, praying with the group to have his defects removed. It was also

common in Akron for the "old men" of the group to take the newcomer upstairs to confirm that this candidate was an actual "member" of the group.

Clarence was responsible for changing this definition of Sponsor to a much simpler "someone who is ahead of you in the program and willing to show you what they had done," which is what we think of a sponsor to be now.

With Clarence's influence, the Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper began running articles on Alcoholics Anonymous (written by a member of Clarence's group), the archdiocese approved the non-Oxford Group fellowship as appropriate for Catholics, and the Cleveland Fellowship grew at a rate that surprised Bill and Bob.

In 1938, there were two groups; one in Akron and one in New York. In 1939, there were five; three groups formed quickly in Cleveland without Bill or Bob to guide them, but with Clarence's push, the new form of Sponsorship and focused on Steps and the use of the Big Book for new members.

By January of 1940, two more groups had formed in Cleveland and as another landmark, the Cleveland Service Committee was the first service structure designed to serve AA.

When the Saturday Evening Post article by Jack Alexander appeared in 1941, it was estimated there were 400 members in the three cities (or traveling across the country on their jobs with one of those three cities as their base) who could count a year of sobriety or more. Immediately after the appearance of the article, the membership jumped from 400 to over 8,000.

⁸ Early members of what would become AA were all men. The story and process for women was later found to be the same as for men.

The new groups were founded on the Big Book for use as a group study focus and personal work on the Steps. There were so many new people that there were not enough Sponsors to serve everyone, and several of the fellowships began “Newcomer” or “Beginner’s” classes to introduce the new people to the tools of the program, the use of the book, the Steps, and getting into the new life.

The Recovery Reader is intended to follow that trail of shared sponsorship, education, and study.

The Explosive Growth of Membership

In 1940, a reporter for the Saturday Evening Post was assigned the story to investigate Alcoholics Anonymous. The author, Jack Alexander, was a muckraker who had just exposed the corruption in the mineworker’s union and fully expected to find another major scam in progress.

He attended a few meetings and was completely swept into a complete supporter of AA. His article appeared in the March 17, 1941 issue of the Saturday Evening Post, one of the most popular magazines of the era.

As a result of the article, the membership of AA exploded from approximately 400 at the time the article appeared, to over 6,000 in just a few weeks.

There were so many new members; there were not enough sponsors to work with the new members. The “Class” was developed in several different areas at about the same time. Committees formed to establish local service offices around the country, and many independent groups issued their own Recovery oriented materials, such as 24 Hours a Day, the Eye Opener, Stools and Bottles, and more than a dozen beginner class outlines.

Much of the material for this class has been taken from the 1940s writings of the Akron Group, the Cleveland Service Committee, and the beginner’s classes documented in Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis, Little Rock, Los Angeles, and elsewhere.

Hundreds of new groups were founded by individual alcoholics who ordered a copy of the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* from the New York service office, now dubbed the WSO (World Service Office), who proceeded to get sober and seek out other alcoholics to work with.

Rethinking Early Recovery Rates

In great angst and superiority, old timers complain that we are doing things wrong - that in the beginning, AA had a 75% success rate. Today various current recovery rates run between 5% and 35% (depending on the source or the viewpoint of the speaker).

The first question that is raised in this argument is how the statistics on an anonymous recovery group were collected.

It must be remembered that early AA was not like the current fellowship.

Members could only be admitted to the fellowship after a medical detox. The first time someone wanted to join who had not gone through the medical detox was a source of great conflict.

Early members were almost exclusively older, white, professional males. These were the “upper crust” of society the Oxford Group attracted. When the first women came to get sober, it was controversial. The first African American was a transvestite drug addict who wanted to get sober and single-handedly kicked in the door for many minorities to join the fellowship, although he himself did not stay sober.

Before going to the first meeting, you had to have a Sponsor and have done the work of what we would now call the first six steps.

So the early success rate is counting only people who;

- *Were male (later joined by a few women);*
- *Were white;*
- *Were from the upper classes;*
- *Had gone through a medical detox;*
- *Who knew “someone who knew someone” to locate and get into a meeting (and there were only two*

meetings anywhere at the time - Akron and New York.);

- *Were Protestant Christian, or willing to become one (most early Oxford Group members were Episcopal, Lutheran, or Methodist);*
- *Had already admitted their alcoholism;*
- *Had found their personal Higher Power or concept of God;*
- *Had already turned their life over to the care of that concept of God;*
- *Had detailed their previous misdeeds and actions in an inventory;*
- *Had shared that inventory with their Sponsor;*
- *Had come to see their own defects in what had gone wrong in their life.*

At that point, they were admitted to their first meeting, on their knees in prayer to have their defects removed, and subject to the approval of the existing members of the group.

Of the people who had jumped through all these hoops, 75% stayed sober or showed significant improvement from their first meeting. The real number of people who failed to reach the point of getting to a group may never be known.

Bill Wilson wrote with some concern how fear of losing what they found had prevented them from the kind of outreach AA now takes for granted. Today, meetings are available to anyone who looks, or has someone who cares enough to provide them with a meeting time and location. New people can find AA in the phone book; are directed by a doctor, a judge, or a clergyman; or simply through friends or family members who are already sober.

Bill kept a copy of his copy of the first printing of the book Alcoholics Anonymous

on his desk and recorded the fate of those whose stories had appeared in the first edition of the Big Book.

In addition to Dr. Bob's story, thirty-two additional personal accounts of recovery were published. Of these, twenty-one members went out. Seven died drunk, but the others made it back for a second chance at recovery.

Hank Parkhurst, the man who made it possible for the book to appear, was one of those who died drunk.

The lesson of the book has been that anyone, anywhere, who is willing to follow the directions, can find and keep sobriety.

"Following the directions" is more than just a pass through the twelve steps, but incorporating the lessons and principles found in the Steps into our daily life. We achieve that by repetition and constantly looking at how the tools we have been given can be used over and over again.

Bill and Bob reviewed the progress of their groups and reviewed their success rate. Different sources gave results from 5% to 35% actually remaining sober. Current medical tracking indicates from 31% to 37%

of AA attending maintain long-term sobriety, and the survey figures from AA's World Service give similar results.

But even those numbers defy the terminal nature of alcoholism over the previous history of mankind. The Twelve Step system, if followed, proved to provide the first substantial success for any system of finding and maintaining long-term sobriety.

It should also be remembered that with the exception of those few with significant religious or spiritual experiences, as indicated by Dr. Jung, there had been no system of getting anyone sober, and alcoholics had been doomed to a prolonged, agonizing death by the dissipation of the body and spirit alcoholism created, or the violent death alcoholics can bring upon themselves through their actions during drinking episodes.

It keeps us aware that anyone getting, and remaining sober, is a miracle by all spiritual and religious standards, and a "deviation" from previous expectations by scientific standards.

It should always keep us grateful.